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ABSTRACT

This report is a summary of Washington State's first 18 months of public higher education assessment activities. The two main sections of the report provide, first, summaries of the institutional assessment activities and, second, a discussion of the statewide assessment indicators. Specific sections examine the collection of entry-level baseline information, the intermediate assessment of math and writing skills, end-of-program assessment, post-graduate assessment, periodic program review, and how assessments are being used. Statewide indicators parallel to the institutional assessment activities currently taking place on each campus are also discussed and include the use of student information, intermediate assessment, end-of-program assessment, program review, and data on the employment of graduates. The report indicates that, over the past 18 months, Washington's public institutions of higher education have developed and implemented assessment plans which have begun to produce results in improving undergraduate education. Appendices present historical background information and a list of the statewide assessment indicators. (GLR)

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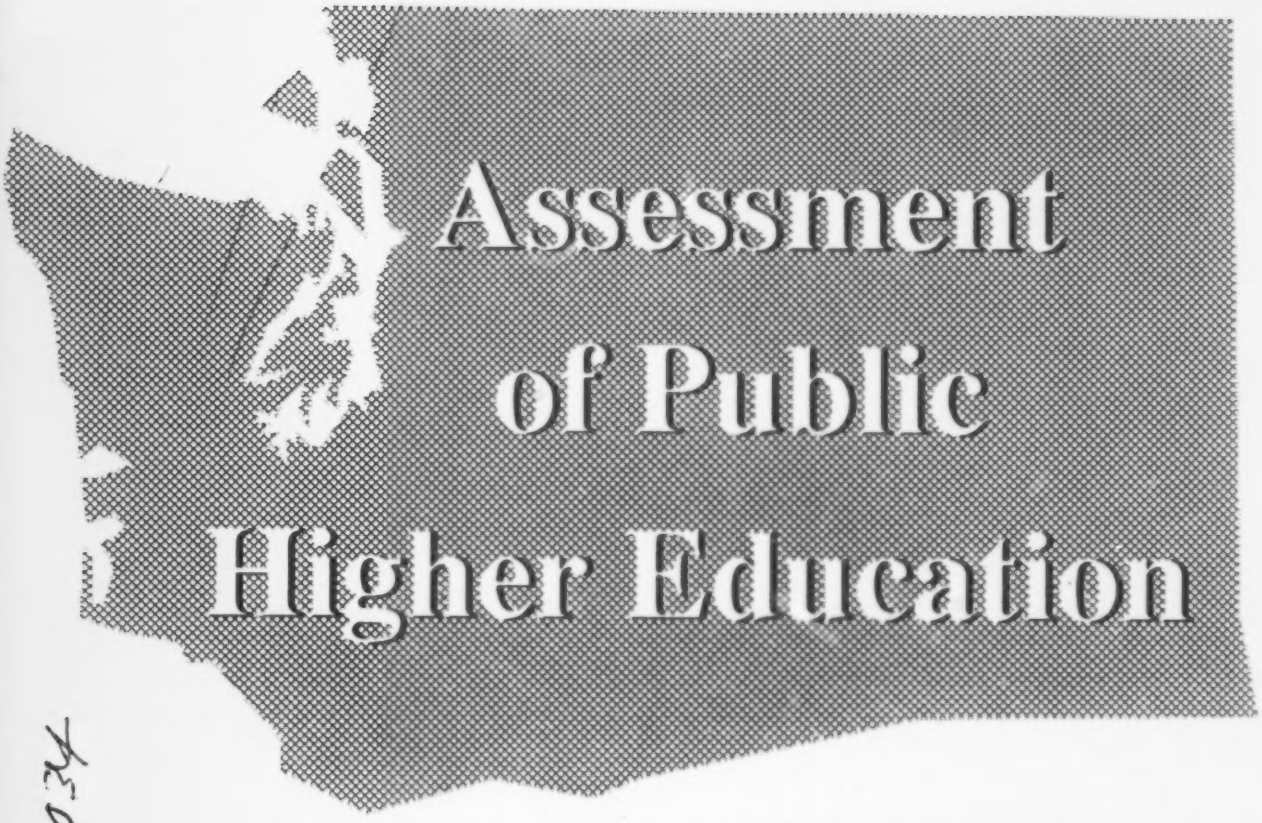

Assessment of Public Higher Education

Preliminary Baseline Report

HE 027 034

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March 1991

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PREFACE

This report is a summary of Washington's first eighteen month's public higher education assessment activities, as directed by the Washington State Legislature and the Higher Education Coordinating Board. Comments or requests for additional copies should be directed to the author at the HECB, 917 Lakeridge Way, Mail Stop GV-11, Olympia, WA 98504.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is indebted to many people for the information contained in this report. First and foremost are the institutional assessment coordinators who have collected the data, provided the information, and recommended improvements in the format and conclusions of this report: Bill Moore, Jan Yoshiwara, and Loretta Seppanen at the State Board for Community College Education, Steve Hunter at The Evergreen State College, Joe Trimble at Western Washington University, Elwyn LaPoint at Eastern Washington University, Greg Trujillo at Central Washington University, John Tarnai at Washington State University, and Jerry Gilmore at the University of Washington.

Support for this effort from the State Board for Community College Education, the Council of Presidents, and academic officers -- especially Dave Habura, Terry Teal, Russ Lidman, Larry DeLorme, Ernie Gilmour, Ron Hopkins, and Herman Lujan -- was essential for it to have meaning for educational improvement. The structure and policy guidance for this effort was provided by the Higher Education Coordinating Board Subcommittee on Assessment: David Tang (Chair), Pearl McElheran, and Judith Wiseman, who contributed many hours of assistance beyond their ongoing Board commitments. The many meetings, schedules, trips, presentations, and documents which culminate in this report would not have been possible without the assistance of Debbie Cline, Michele Harper, Kitsy Thomas, and Alice Vermillion at the HECB and Shirley Strawn and Donna Carnahan at the Council of Presidents. The errors and omissions which remain after all this effort are the author's alone.

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ASSESSMENT OF PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION

PRELIMINARY BASELINE REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Assessment was one of the cornerstones laid by the Higher Education Coordinating Board in *Building a System: The Washington State Master Plan for Higher Education* (HECB, 1987). This initiative was reinforced by the Governor and the Legislature, which provided $400,000 for assessment activities to each institution and to the State Board for Community College Education in the 1989-91 Biennial Budget. This was supplemented by $60,000 in assessment funding for each community college in 1990.

Washington's public higher education institutions, wary at first, have built on this initiative. They have used the funds appropriated by the legislature to develop information which will help improve the quality of education on their campuses as well as provide accountability to the public.

In 1989 the Higher Education Coordinating Board developed guidelines for institution-based assessment. The guidelines specified that campus assessment activities should be undertaken in six areas:

Baseline student data
Intermediate evaluation of writing and math
End of program assessment
Alumni satisfaction
Employer perceptions
Program reviews

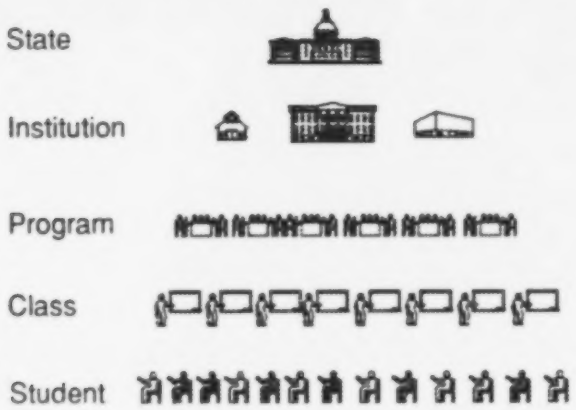
Over the past year and a half the institutions have developed and implemented assessment plans with the assistance of the Council of Presidents, the State Board for Community College Education, and the Higher Education Coordinating Board. Involvement of faculty, crucial for the success of institution-based assessment, has been a high priority of each institution. Two jointly sponsored state assessment conferences have drawn over 500 faculty and staff, including over 20 college presidents. The Higher Education Coordinating Board has formed a Subcommittee on Assessment to monitor institutional efforts and to coordinate the Board's twice yearly review of assessment progress.

A multi-faceted program such as this, which involves many participants evaluating the outcomes of instruction over several years, will not be completed in one biennium. The Board has initiated a process which is beginning to bring improvements to the education students receive on public campuses and to provide improved information for faculty, campus administrators, and educational policy-makers. The initial results of this effort constitute the balance of this report.

RESULTS

Assessment is conducted at many levels in higher education, beginning with the student:

Levels of Assessment



Although this report deals only with statewide and institutional levels of assessment, it is important to remember that these levels reflect and inform the assessment conducted at the program, class, and student levels. Student perceptions and achievement inform all other levels of assessment. Class assessment provides a perspective on faculty performance as well as student learning. Intensive periodic program assessment includes a review of curriculum, faculty, administration, and facilities, as well as student outcomes. All these ongoing assessment activities, coupled with institutional records and special studies provide a wealth of information which institution level and statewide assessment are beginning to use.

INSTITUTIONAL SELF-EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

The Higher Education Coordinating Board's decision to encourage the use of assessment for institutional self-evaluation and improvement has stimulated considerable activity on all campuses. Institutions have seized the opportunity to evaluate new models, such as writing across the curriculum, to monitor strategic plans, and to direct program improvement. This has resulted in a multi-faceted assessment program on most campuses. Each program is unique to each campus, to its intended use of the information, and often to the program or activities which are being evaluated. Although this approach has a strong likelihood of producing meaningful improvement in educational programs over the long term, it produces few common measures which can be summarized at the system level in the short term. Highlights of institutional assessment activities and institutional uses of assessment

information are summarized in the first section of this report. More complete descriptions of assessment activities are available from individual institutions and the HECB.

STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT INDICATORS

To supplement these campus-based assessment activities, the assessment coordinators and the HECB Subcommittee on Assessment have developed statewide assessment indicators which will be useful to state policy makers. These indicators will eventually include common measures from entering student questionnaires and alumni surveys as well as currently available supplemental information such as retention rates, graduation rates, and employment rates. The currently available information is summarized in the second section of this report.

Statewide assessment indicators, outlined below, reflect categories of information similar to those adopted by the HECB for institution-based assessment. A complete list of statewide indicators is included in Appendix B. These indicators were selected to provide an initial perspective on issues of general concern in higher education, and to provide a baseline against which future efforts can be measured.

Statewide Assessment Indicators

- **Student Information**
  - student characteristics
  - entering student grade point averages
  - entering student test scores
- **Intermediate Assessment**
  - proficiency requirements
  - retention rates
- **End-of-Program Assessment**
  - degrees confered
  - graduation rates
- **Program Review**
  - scheduled reviews
  - accreditation schedules
- **Alumni Satisfaction**
  - common survey questions
  - results from previous surveys
- **Employment of Graduates**
  - employment rates
  - average income
  - graduate school enrollment

SUMMARY OF INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

The six areas of institutional assessment defined by the HECB answer three primary questions:

- **Who attends?**
  - entry-level baseline information
- **What do they learn?**
  - intermediate evaluation of writing and math
  - end of program assessment
- **How good is their education?**
  - alumni satisfaction survey
  - employer perceptions
  - program reviews

ENTRY-LEVEL BASELINE INFORMATION

The University of Washington has added additional test score and high school course information to its student data base and has administered the Cooperative Institutional Research Program to Fall 1990 Freshmen.

Washington State University has developed a common data base of student information, and is collecting baseline information, including writing sample from all entering students.

In summer 1990 Central Washington University began using a computer adaptive registration, advising, and testing program for all entering Freshmen; this will include a writing sample and tests of writing and mathematics skills.

Eastern Washington University has expanded its entry level baseline student data base and begun using it to develop methods for predicting student success and retention and for assessing the effectiveness of basic skills placement procedures.

Western Washington University has developed a student tracking system which will provide a flexible report base for decision makers. The system contains over 250 information items about each student.

The Evergreen State College has added test score data and high school course information to its student data base and will begin collecting baseline writing samples month and quantitative skill measures from entering students.

The State Board for Community College Education has added data on student educational objectives, prior education, and work and family responsibilities to its Student Management Information System.

INTERMEDIATE ASSESSMENT OF QUANTITATIVE AND WRITING SKILLS

The University of Washington has begun analysis of writing portfolios with 136 freshman who are enrolled in a writing intensive course. The UW is also pilot testing potential quantitative and symbolic reasoning instruments.

Washington State University has completed a pilot test of its writing qualification exam. The results are being used to make changes in how English composition classes are taught. Assessment of quantitative skills is just beginning, and a pilot test is expected in Spring of 1991.

Central Washington University has pilot tested a the use of writing samples for intermediate assessment and is currently revising the format as a result of the pilot.

Eastern Washington University has designed and pilot tested intermediate writing and quantitative skills assessment instruments. Implementation of these instruments is occurring in the current academic year.

Western Washington University plans to restructure its Junior Writing Exam to parallel its freshman writing assessment to provide a mid-career value-added measure of writing proficiency.

The Evergreen State College will collect self-evaluation writing samples and quantitative skill samples at the beginning and end of core courses in 1990-91.

The State Board for Community College Education has funded several institution level incentive grants to evaluate quantitative and writing skills in 1990-91. Funding of assessment activities at each community college campus by the 1990 legislature should significantly strength this work. In addition, the SBCCE conducted a system-wide survey of faculty perceptions about student writing, with results available in Spring 1991.

END-OF-PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

The University of Washington has six departments developing new end-of-program assessment procedures for implementation in 1990-91; the remaining departments will develop end-of-program assessments in 1991-93.

Washington State University has required all degree granting programs to develop and implement a plan for end-of-program assessment by Spring of 1991. To

assist academic departments in developing plans, WSU developed a procedural manual for end-of-program assessment, which describes recommended approaches and offers suggestions for data collection and use of assessment results.

Central Washington University departments are developing end-of-major tests during the current academic year with the intent to begin testing graduating students in Fall 1991.

Eastern Washington University has completed its evaluation of all current end-of-program assessments, and is phasing in twelve new end of program assessment enhancements this year. Additional programs will undertake end of program assessment enhancements in the next academic year.

Western Washington University has surveyed current end-of-program practices in all departments and plans to add a senior writing assignment which parallels the freshman and junior writing exams in order to provide another value-added measure of writing proficiency.

The Evergreen State College is evaluating the usefulness of senior capstone projects as indicators of student progress, and is exploring ways to assess student progress in areas which have been adopted as primary teaching and learning goals of the college.

The State Board for Community College Education has assessed the placement success of vocational students through its vocational outcomes baseline study. By the end of 1990-91, the SBCCE will have also completed a transfer rate study and a pilot followup study of developmental education students.

POST-GRADUATE ASSESSMENT OF THE SATISFACTION OF ALUMNI AND EMPLOYERS

The public colleges and universities have developed fourteen common items to include in all their alumni surveys. Although the surveys may differ in format, scoring and year of graduation, responses to these questions should provide a statewide perspective on alumni satisfaction. Each institution will also use additional questions for its own evaluation program. Analysis of these surveys will be completed during this academic year. Several campuses have already completed analysis of their alumni surveys. Faculty have found them useful in developing improvements in the curriculum.

In addition, Central Washington University and Western Washington University are using alumni surveys to assess program satisfaction, attrition and retention, with emphasis on the success of minority students; Eastern Washington University has completed an alumni mail survey and will hold alumni focus groups. The Evergreen State College has completed an alumni survey and implemented curricular changes in response to its results. The State Board for Community College Education has surveyed former vocational students and is planning to collect similar followup information on academic/transfer students.

There are a number of technical problems with employer surveys, which have led to very different approaches from each campus. Many employers refuse to respond to such surveys. In most instances, it is necessary to ask employers about all graduates of a certain school or program rather than about a single individual. There is considerable concern about surveys going to many employers from all six four-year institutions. Despite these problems, each campus has developed a survey of employer satisfaction with recent graduates for implementation within the next year; three have already been completed. These will be very difficult to summarize on a statewide level. The State Board for Community College Education participated in a statewide study of training and retraining needs, which included an employer satisfaction survey, coordinated by the Office of Financial Management.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board's Subcommittee on Assessment has initiated discussions with business leaders. The Subcommittee plans to identify business concerns and to work with the business community to devise effective means for assessing employer satisfaction with public higher education.

PERIODIC PROGRAM REVIEW

Individual departments and institutions are continuing program review according to internal schedules and accreditation requirements. Revised program review guidelines are under development by Higher Education Coordinating Board staff in cooperation with institutional representatives. The revised guidelines will emphasize the use of assessment information. It is expected that the increased information available from other assessment activities will considerably improve the quality and effectiveness of periodic review of existing academic programs.

ASSESSMENT INFORMATION: IS IT BEING USED?

The ultimate value of institution-based assessment will be found in the uses of assessment information to improve undergraduate education. Assessment information can improve administrative and faculty decisions about procedures, programs, curriculum, and teaching methods. There are already several changes which have been prompted by assessment findings. Examples from each institution are summarized below. A full report on uses of assessment information has been provided to the Higher Education Coordinating Board by each institution and is available on request from the institution or the HECB. Below are some examples of the ways in which institutions have already used assessment information:

> Based on an analysis of student information and course-taking patterns, the University of Washington has strengthened its math prerequisite requirements to insure that students are taking the appropriate level math courses.

Implementation of the University of Washington's large course enhancement project and Washington State University's writing across the curriculum project have been aided by information from student assessment information and alumni surveys.

Central Washington University has instituted basic skills testing in reading, writing, and mathematics of all entering freshmen; scores on these tests are used to place students in the appropriate classes.

Eastern Washington University has expanded academic advising in its College of Business as a result of survey responses from alumni.

Western Washington University has begun a review of general undergraduate requirements based in part on responses to its alumni survey, and has already added a generalized University 101 course to help students adapt to the university environment.

The Evergreen State College has added a Math Center and increased mathematics emphasis to its curriculum, partly as a result of its assessment of quantitative skills development and its alumni survey, which pointed to deficiencies in this area.

The State Board for Community College Education has completed its Vocational Outcomes Study and has identified several areas for improvement: graduates' "adaptive skills" (writing, spelling, math, etc.) and academic achievement and employment outcomes of members of certain minority groups and single parents. Recommendations on these issues are scheduled for presentation to the State Board in April 1991.

Each institution has mechanisms in place to disseminate assessment information to the appropriate decision level or body. For example, at Western Washington University, assessment results are sorted by program and department. The program head receives results for his or her program; the department chair receives the results for all programs in the department; and the President receives the results for all departments. Eastern Washington University has formed faculty assessment committees for each assessment activity (writing assessment, quantitative assessment, etc.), which report to the administration and Councils the Faculty Senate. Central Washington University has formed a subcommittee of the Academic Council to review assessment findings and recommend action steps to the Council. At The Evergreen State College an Assessment Study Group reviews assessment findings and makes recommendations for institutional improvement to the Provost and faculty. The University of Washington and Washington State University have assigned responsibility for coordinating the use of assessment results to Vice Provosts, who are in a position to work with faculty and administrative groups to

respond to findings. The State Board for Community College Education has structured a systematic review of "potential action issues" from assessment results by system commissions and councils, which make recommendations to the State Board.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board's Subcommittee on Assessment meets frequently with institutional representatives to review assessment results and to provide direction. Now that assessment is past the planning and implementation phase, the Subcommittee's questions of institutions are increasingly, "What did you learn?" and "What will you do differently?"

Twice each year the institutions provide formal assessment progress reports which are presented to the Subcommittee on Assessment and reviewed by the full Board. The Copies of these reports are available on request from the Higher Education Coordinating Board.

STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT INDICATORS

The Higher Education Coordinating Board developed statewide assessment indicators to supplement institution-based assessment information. These indicators are designed to provide a statewide perspective on the status of public higher education. The statewide indicators parallel the institutional assessment activities which are taking place on each campus:

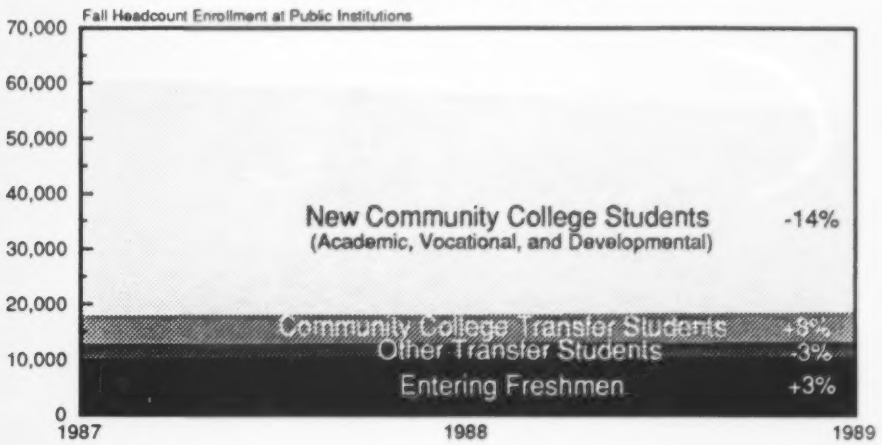
- **Student Information**
  - entering student qualifications
- **Intermediate Assessment**
  - retention rates
- **End-of-Program Assessment**
  - graduation rates
- **Program Review**
  - schedule
- **Alumni Satisfaction**
  - common survey questions
- **Employment of Graduates**
  - employment rates and income

STUDENT INFORMATION

Nearly two-thirds of new public higher education students in Fall 1989 entered community colleges. Entering freshmen at four-year public institutions accounted for another 24% of entering students; transfers from community colleges another 10%; and transfers from other institutions, 4%. There were approximately 5% fewer entering students in 1989 than in 1987, due to increased retention of previously enrolled students and fixed total enrollment ceilings. Most of this decline was in new

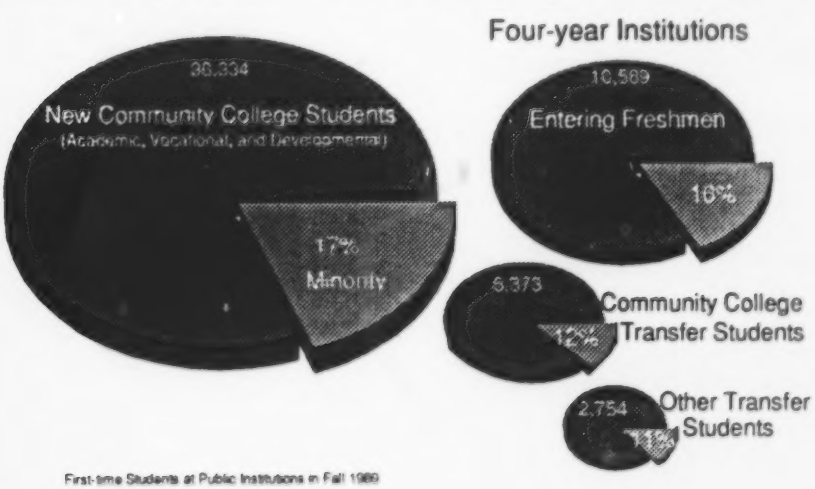
community college students. There was a substantial (8%) increase in students transferring to public four-year institutions from community colleges between 1987 and 1989. There was also a 3% increase in freshman entrants to public four-year institutions. Students transferring from other institutions declined by 3%.

Entering Students



The students who entered public higher education in the Fall of 1989 closely matched the state's demographic profile. Approximately half of the students at each level were women; approximately half were men. As the graph below shows, minority representation in the entering classes was higher for entering freshmen and first-time community college students than for new transfers.

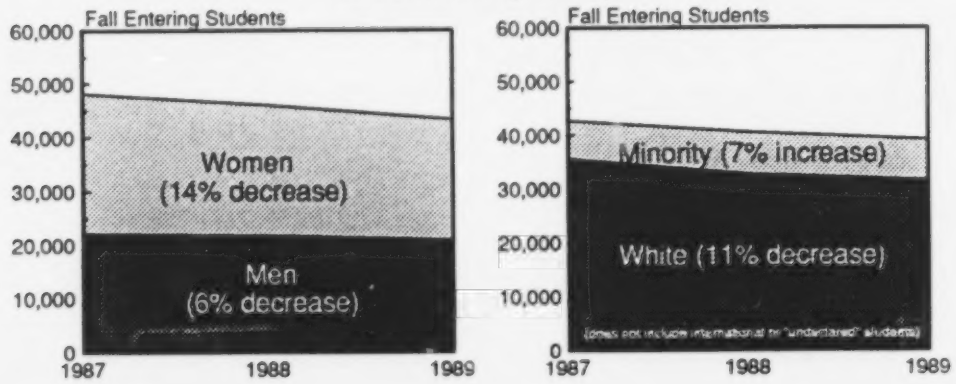
Characteristics of Entering Students



First-time Students at Public Institutions in Fall 1989

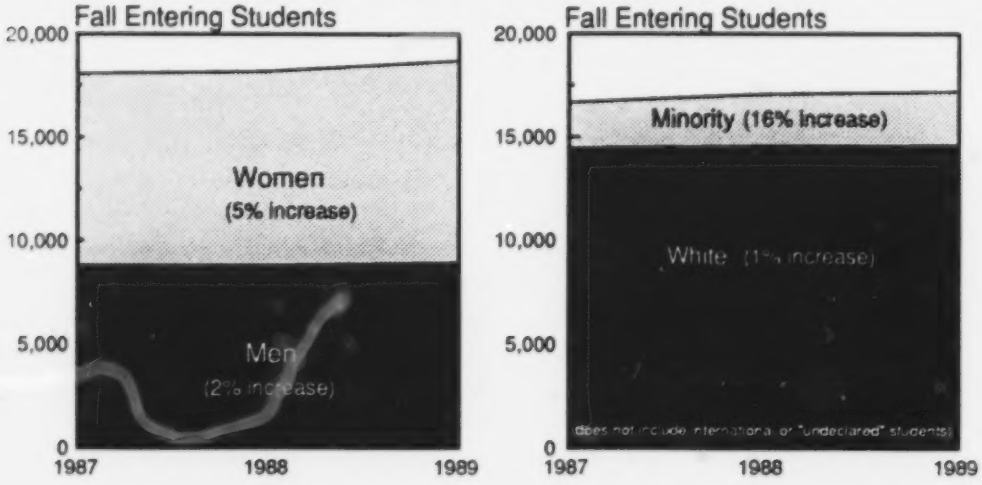
The number of students entering community colleges for the first time declined by 9% between 1987 and 1989, although total enrollment increased slightly during those years. The decline in entering students was accompanied by declines in part-time students and increased retention of previous students in the face of enrollment lids. The number of women first-time entrants declined more than the number of men (14% vs. 6%). The number of minority entrants increased by 7% between 1987 and 1989, despite the overall decline in new enrollees.

Enrollment of Women and Minorities
at Community Colleges



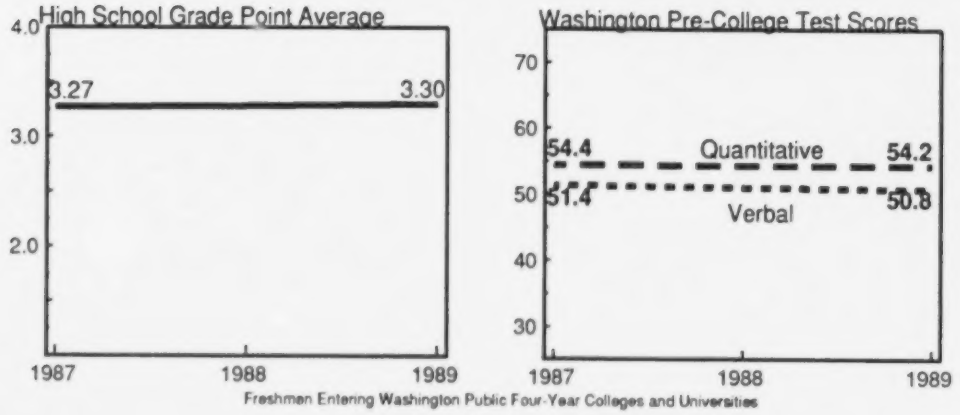
At public four-year institutions, there were significant increases in undergraduate female (+5%) and minority (+16%) entering students, which contributed to an overall 3% increase in entering students between 1987 and 1989:

Undergraduate Enrollment of Women and Minorities
at Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities



Entering students' grade point averages were very high at public four-year institutions. The average for entering students was 3.3 -- a B+ average. (State admissions policy sets the minimum GPA for entering freshmen at Central, Eastern, Western, and Evergreen at 2.0; 2.5 at UW and WSU.) Students transferring from community colleges and other institutions were also above a 3.0. Test scores were also quite high. These high averages compared to other states and institutions indicate that students with lower GPAs and test scores who are capable of college level work are not entering four-year colleges and universities, probably due to enrollment lids.

Freshman GPA and Test Scores



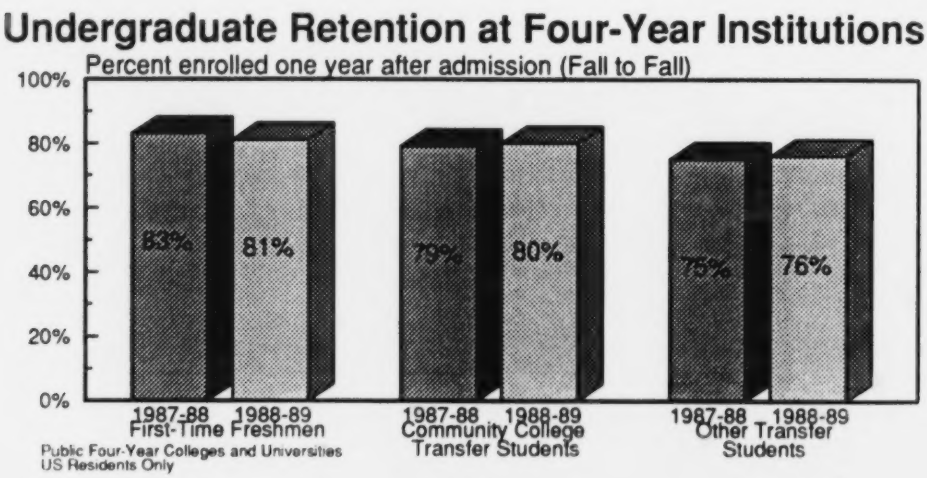
Freshmen Entering Washington Public Four-Year Colleges and Universities

Overall, the available information on students is encouraging. Enrollment of women, minority, and community college transfer students has increased. The grade point averages and test scores of students entering four-year institutions have remained high, partly the result of limited space availability. If access were to increase, these test scores and GPA levels would be expected to decline.

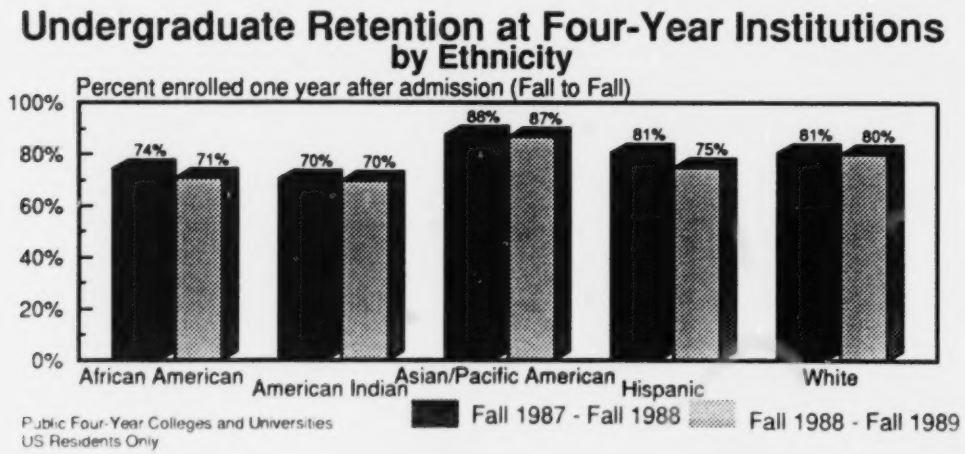
INTERMEDIATE ASSESSMENT

Student retention is an indicator of satisfactory undergraduate progress. Undergraduate retention has remained very high at public four-year institutions, as can be seen from the graph below. Over 80% of the first-time freshmen and community

college transfer students enrolled in fall 1988 were still enrolled in fall 1989; approximately 75% of other transfer students were still enrolled.



Retention rates varied among ethnic groups. African American, American Indian, and Hispanic students had lower retention rates than Asian and Pacific Americans or White students:

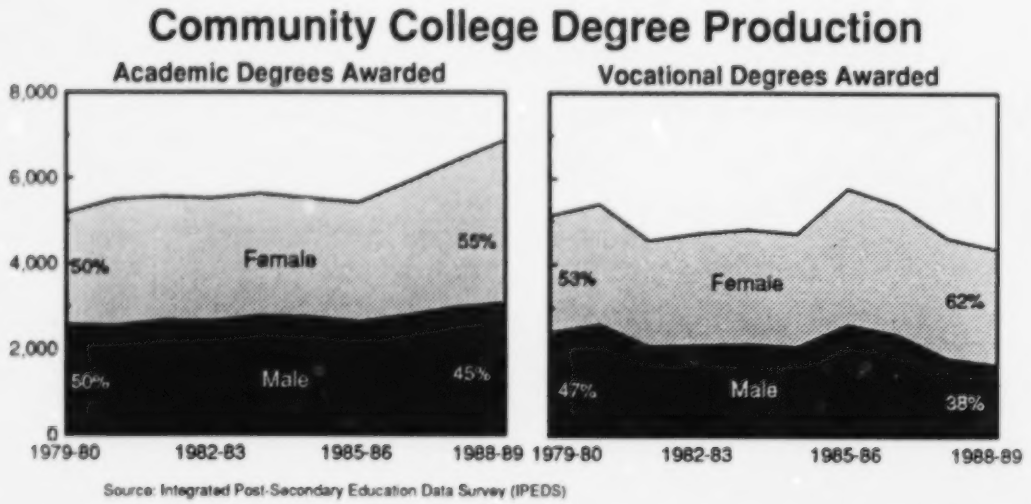


Washington's retention rates are very high compared with other states and institutions. These high retention rates would be more difficult to maintain if

enrollment ceilings were raised, since there would be more opportunity for transfer to other institutions. The importance of continued efforts to improve minority retention is underscored by the different retention rates found among Asian and Pacific American, American Indian, and Hispanic students.

END-OF-PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

Associate degrees awarded by Washington community colleges have increased slightly over the past ten years. However, the graph below shows that the recent increase in academic degrees has been offset by a decrease in vocational degree awards. This trend may be explained at least in part by the state's enrollment and admissions policies, which have tended to encourage community college transfer students.



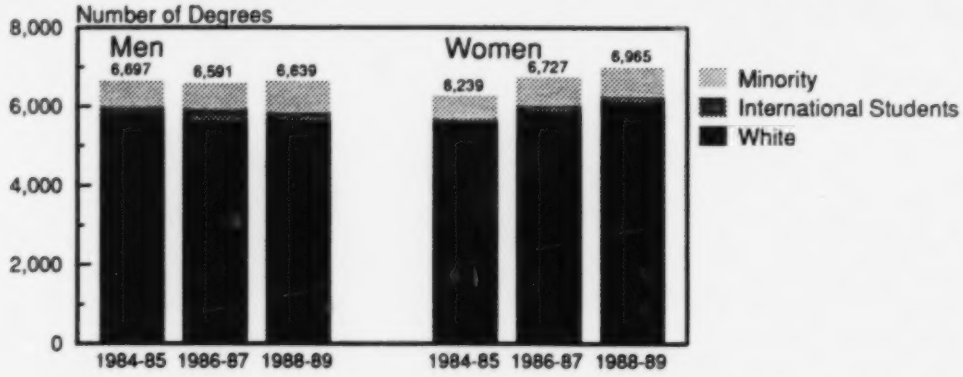
Source: Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data Survey (IPEDS)

The graph above also shows that women have an increasing share of the associate degrees awarded. In 1988-89 women accounted for 55% of the academic degree awards compared with 50% in 1979-80. Women also accounted for an

increasing share of vocational degree awards, increasing from 53% in 1979-80 to 62% in 1988-89.

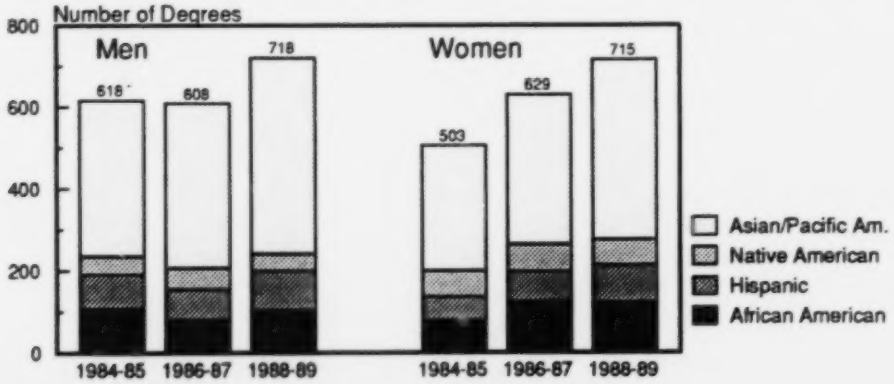
A similar trend was seen in baccalaureate degree awards over a more recent time period (academic years 1984-85 through 1988-89 -- degree production in previous years was reported by a different, non-comparable system). The 5% increase in baccalaureate degree awards was solely attributable to a 12% increase in the number of degrees awarded to women:

Baccalaureate Degrees Granted by Ethnicity and Gender



The number of baccalaureate degrees awarded to White men declined between 1984-85 and 1988-89. However, the number of degrees awarded increased for both sexes in all minority groups except African American men:

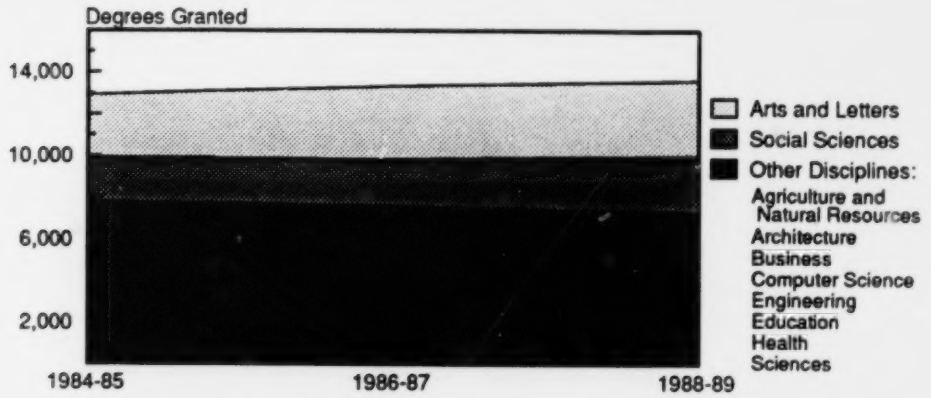
Baccalaureate Degrees Awarded to Minorities



Source: Integrated Post-Secondary Data Survey (IPEDS)

The increase in baccalaureate degrees was solely attributable to increases in degrees in arts and letters and the social sciences between 1984-85 and 1988-89. There was a decline in degrees awarded in all other disciplines, including business, computer science, engineering, education, health, and science:

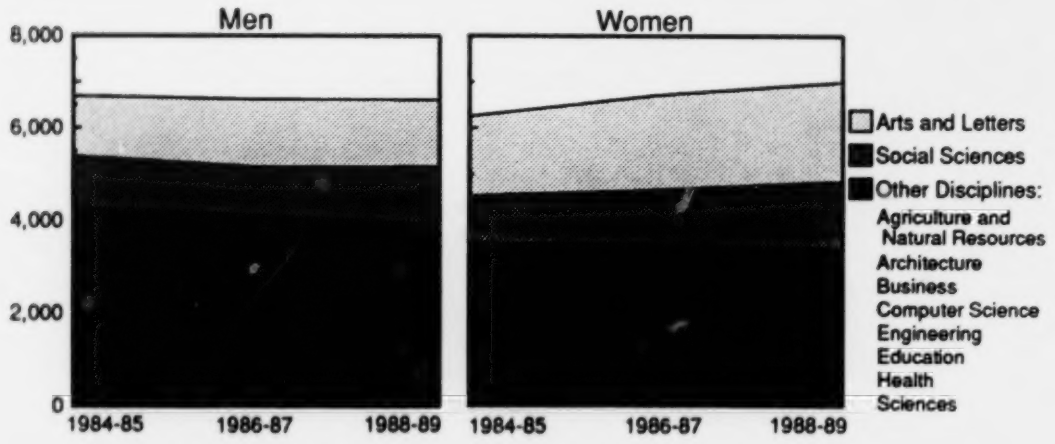
Baccalaureate Degrees Granted by Discipline



Source: Integrated Post-Secondary Education Survey (IPEDS)

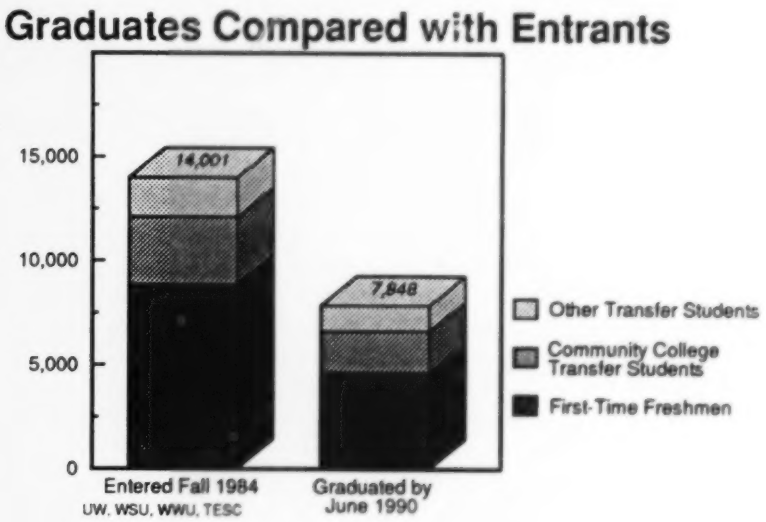
A similar trend in the distribution of baccalaureate degree awards among disciplines was evident for both men and women:

Baccalaureate Degrees Granted by Discipline and Gender

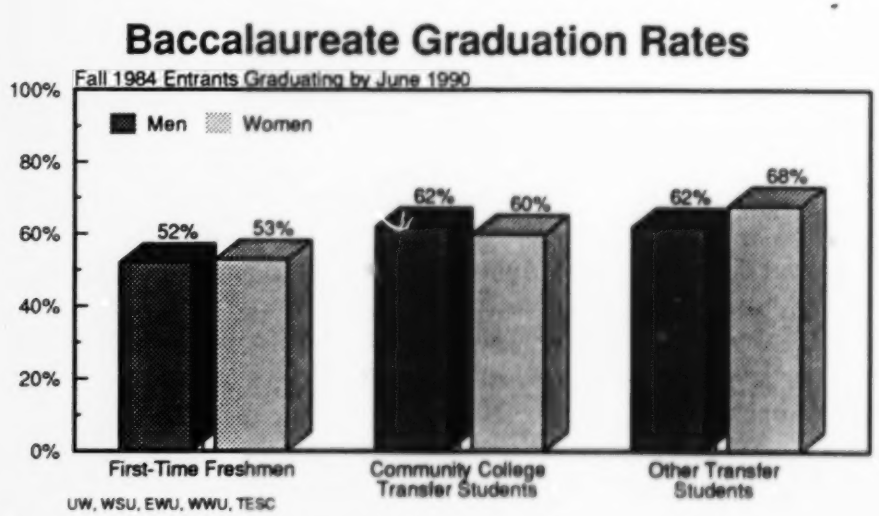


Source: Integrated Post-Secondary Education Survey (IPEDS)

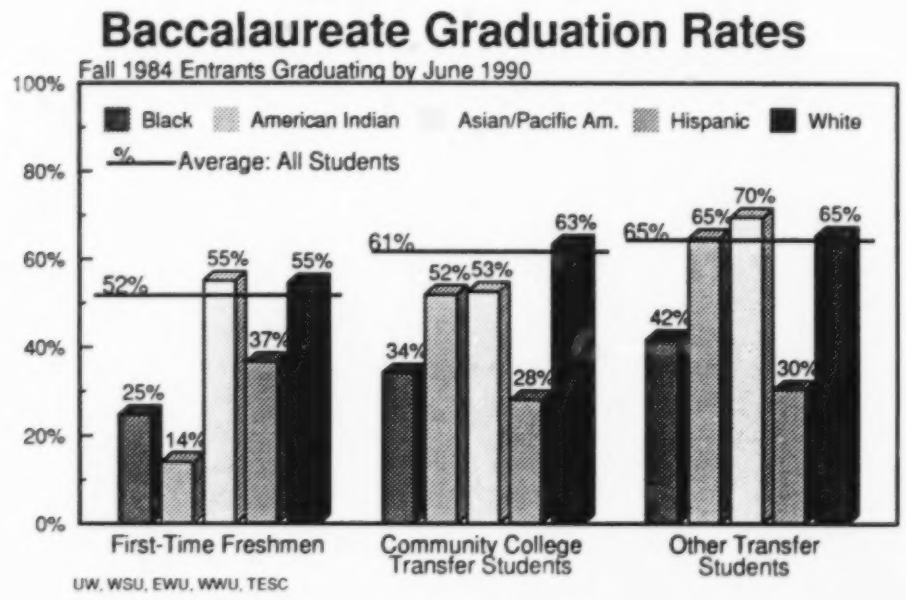
Over half of the men and women who entered a public four-year institution in fall 1984 had graduated from the same institution by June 1990:



These graduation figures do not reflect students who transferred to, and potentially graduated from, another institution after their entry in Fall 1984. Over 60% of the transfer students who entered in fall 1984 had graduated by June 1990. This apparently higher rate actually reflects the courses which these students had taken before transferring to the graduating institution:



The graduation rates for several minority groups were considerably below the rate for all students. Black, American Indian, and Hispanic students who entered as freshmen in 1984 were considerably less likely to have graduated by June 1990 than White and Asian/Pacific American students. This was also the case among Black and Hispanic transfer students. American Indian transfer students, however, had higher graduation rates than Asian/Pacific American transfer students:



Taken as a whole, this information on degrees awarded indicates that degree completion has increased at a faster rate than enrollment has grown over the past six to ten years. The increase has been largely accounted for by increased degree completion by women and minority students. However, the graduation rate for students from most minority groups is considerably below the statewide average. As with fall-to-fall retention rates, the results support the importance of institutional efforts to increase minority graduation rates. Also, increased degree awards have fallen exclusively in the arts and letters and the social sciences. Degree awards have declined in all other disciplines since 1985.

PROGRAM REVIEW

Each public institution conducts periodic reviews of the programs offered on its campus. These reviews of existing programs are conducted with outside faculty from the same discipline and include an examination of faculty, curriculum, assessment information, student mastery, student and alumni satisfaction, need and demand for the program, and success of the program's graduates. The Higher Education Coordinating Board staff evaluates each completed program review and presents its findings to the Board. The program review guidelines are currently under revision by the staff; however, program assessment will continue to include the following elements:

Program Assessment

- **Scheduled Program Reviews**
  - **quality of faculty and content**
  - **need and demand**
  - **student performance**
  - **alumni satisfaction**
  - **employer satisfaction**
- **Conducted by peers from other institutions**
- **Reviewed by HECB**

ALUMNI SATISFACTION

Each public institution has recently surveyed its recent graduates. Included in each institution's alumni survey were 14 common questions about the institution's

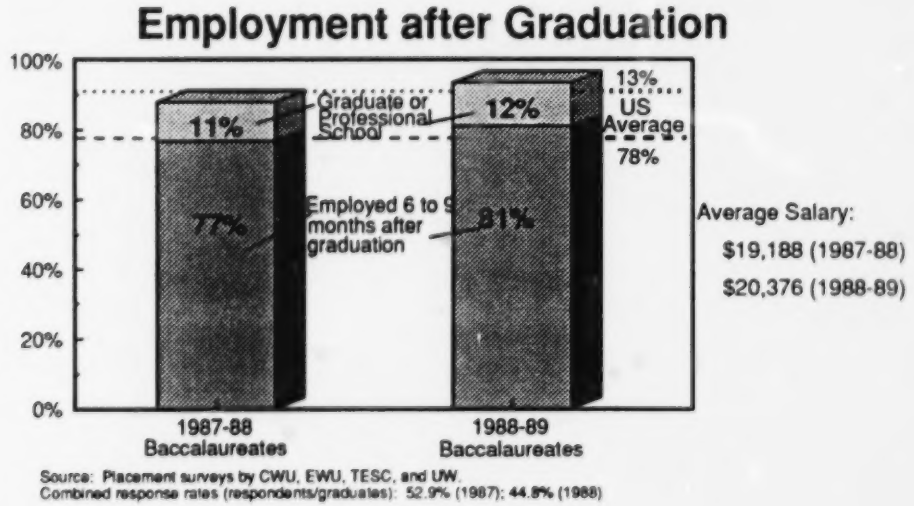
contribution to the graduate's:

Citizenship
Career preparation
Public speaking
Appreciation of the arts
Environmental awareness
Appreciation of other cultures
Quantitative skills
Science understanding
Writing
Ability to work in a group
Preparation for advanced education
Reading
Problem solving
Preparation for independent learning

The analysis of the survey responses is currently underway. Statewide alumni responses to these 14 items should be available in June 1991.

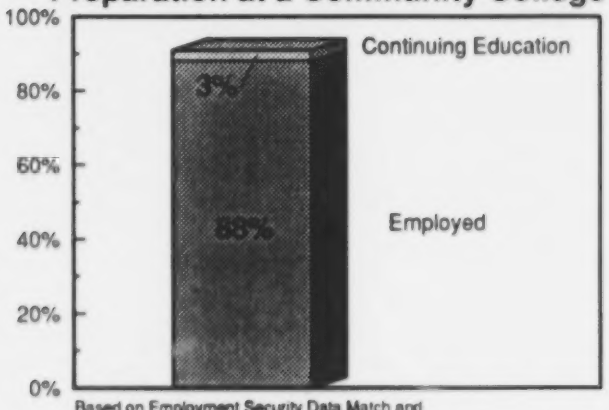
EMPLOYMENT OF GRADUATES

Placement surveys by most of the four-year public institutions indicate a high placement rate for graduates: 81% of those receiving bachelor's degrees in 1988-89 were employed six months after graduation. Their annual average salary was $20,376, considerably above the state median salary. An additional 12% of the 1988-89 graduates were enrolled in graduate or professional school. These figures were higher than the previous year and above the national average:



The Community College Vocational Outcomes Study found similar employment outcomes for their 1987-88 Vocational Prepatory Program completers; 91% were either employed or enrolled in continuing education. Homemakers, disabled workers, and retirees, as well as the unemployed, constitute the remainder of graduates.

Employment after Completing Vocational Preparation at a Community College



Based on Employment Security Data Match and SBCCE Student Satisfaction Survey of 1987-88 vocational prepartory completers

CONCLUSION

This is a baseline report in the sense that it is a summary of initial assessment information. It also provides a baseline for comparison with future assessment efforts. Hopefully, it will also serve to document the beginning of higher education's redoubled efforts to study itself.

Over the past year and a half Washington's public institutions of higher education have developed and implemented assessment plans. These plans have begun to produce results which are being used to improve undergraduate education. The information from institutional assessment activities, coupled with statewide information, are beginning to provide a clearer picture of higher education's effectiveness.

APPENDIX A

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

Studies on assessment programs in other states suggest that several processes are important. First, time to develop clear institutional goals produces assessment measures that are tailored to the institution's specific needs. Second, assessment progresses best when it occurs in an environment of clear and open communication about the uses and expectations for assessment. Third, assessment measures and processes must be acceptable -- intuitively, philosophically, and intellectually -- to the faculty and staff who will use the information to improve curricula, instruction, and services. The measures must also be appropriate to the program and the institution, rather than being generic or potentially inconsistent with the role and mission of the institution. Fourth, faculty and staff must be involved in the adoption, development, or design of the measures as well as in the implementation of the procedures and analysis of the results. Washington's statewide assessment program has attempted to incorporate these processes.

BACKGROUND

Building a System: The Washington State Master Plan for Higher Education (Higher Education Coordinating Board, 1987) identified assessment for program and institutional quality as one of the Plan's four foundation elements. The plan envisioned assessment as a link between two separate but complementary goals: to improve the quality of undergraduate education and to provide needed information about student outcomes to the Coordinating Board and other state policy makers. The Plan specified that progress on achieving the Board's funding goal for higher education was dependent on satisfactory progress by institutions in developing a performance evaluation system. Assessment and improved funding must proceed in tandem.

The plan challenged the public 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education to develop a multi-dimensional program of performance evaluation. Four initial means of assessing educational quality were identified:

- Followup data on graduates' work experience
- Satisfaction surveys about student's educational experience
- Surveys of employer satisfaction with employees' college preparation
- Pilot tests of nationally normed sophomore year tests of communication, computation, and critical thinking skills

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

To some extent, most institutions collect information based on alumni surveys, employer feedback, and the work experience of their graduates. These were

incorporated into Washington's assessment program. However, the proposed addition of a nationally-normed sophomore test to measure critical thinking, communication and computational skills was controversial. The Board directed that committees of institutional personnel be formed to determine whether a test of this kind would be appropriate. Their charge was to pilot test and to evaluate the usefulness and validity of a sophomore test as a measure of student achievement.

Three nationally-normed tests were selected for pilot testing: the College Outcome Measures Program (COMP), the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), and the Academic Profile (AP). Each of these tests were designed to provide assessments of student achievement. The latter two tests were designed to measure student achievement in reading comprehension, writing, mathematics usage, and critical thinking. In addition to these three tests, a one-hour writing essay based on writing prompts provided by the American College Testing Program was administered to 1302 volunteer sophomore level four-year and community college students.

The results of the pilot test indicated that "the AP, the CAAP, and the COMP added relatively little reliable new information about students."* This was generally supported by the assessments of faculty members from each four-year institution and the participating community colleges.

On the basis of this report the Board concluded that currently available standardized tests are not appropriate tools to assess the quality of undergraduate education. In order to assure reliable assessment of educational outcomes in the absence of standardized achievement test, the Board adopted a modified assessment approach:

- collection of entry level baseline data
- alumni satisfaction surveys
- intermediate assessment of quantitative and writing skills
- end of program assessments
- employer satisfaction surveys
- program review

Each public institution has subsequently developed an assessment plan to collect information in each of these areas and has presented its plans and results to date to the Coordinating Board. The institutional plans vary considerably in scope, methodology, and intended uses of the information.

* Interinstitutional Committee of Academic Officers (ICAO) Task Force on Assessment and Community College Sophomore Assessment Task Force, "The Validity and Usefulness of three National Standardized Tests for Measuring the Communication, Computation, and Critical Thinking Skills of Washington State College Sophomores" (May, 1989)

APPENDIX B

STATEWIDE INDICATORS

I. STUDENT INFORMATION
   - A. Fall Quarter Student Headcount (1987, 1988, and 1989)
     1. High School entrants, Community College transfers, and other transfers.
     2. By ethnic group.
     3. By gender.
   - B. Grade Point Average of Fall Entering Classes (1987, 1988, and 1989)
     1. High School entrants, Community College transfers, and other transfers.
     2. By ethnic group.
     3. By gender.
   - C. Test Score Averages of Entering Freshmen (1987, 1988, and 1989)
     1. WPCT.
     2. ACT.
     3. SAT.
   - D. Common Entering Student Questionnaire Items.

II. INTERMEDIATE ASSESSMENT
   - A. Fall-to-Fall Retention Rates of New Students (1987-8, 1988-9, 1989-90)
     1. High School entrants, Community College transfers, and other transfers.
     2. By ethnic group.
     3. By gender.
   - B. Narrative Description of Institutions' Proficiency Requirements
     1. Quantitative Skills.
     2. Writing Skills.
     3. Foreign Language Skills.

III. END-OF-PROGRAM ASSESSMENT
   - A. Six-Year Graduation Rates (Fall 1984 to Fall 1990)
     1. High School entrants, Community College transfers, and other transfers.
     2. By ethnic group.
     3. By gender.
   - B. Degrees Conferred (1984-5, 1986-7, 1988-9)
     1. By program.
     2. By ethnic group.
     3. By gender.

IV. PROGRAM REVIEW
   - A. Review schedule for current, last, and next biennia.
   - B. Program accreditation schedule for current, last, and next biennia.

V. ALUMNI SATISFACTION
   - A. Common elements from surveys.
   - B. Results from previous alumni and student surveys.

VI. EMPLOYER SATISFACTION
   - A. Status of 1987-8, 1988-9, 1989-90 Baccalaureate graduates.
     1. Percent employed and average income.
     2. Percent in graduate school.